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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ASTANA 000443

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, S/SRAP, CA/OCS
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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR RECOMMENDS "BE
STATESMAN-LIKE" WITH NAZARBAYEV TO RESOLVE PEACE CORPS CASE

REF: A. ASTANA 0381

[1](#)B. ASTANA 0373

[1](#)C. ASTANA 0175

[1](#)D. ASTANA 0135

[1](#)E. ASTANA 0055

[1](#)F. 08 ASTANA 2576

[1](#)G. 08 ASTANA 2410 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Ambassador Richard E. Hoagland: 1.4 (B), (D)

[1](#)1. (S) SUMMARY: Presidential Foreign Policy Advisor Kairat Sarybay called in the Ambassador on March 12 to discuss the criminal case against Peace Corps volunteer Anthony Sharp. He advised the Ambassador it is not "constructive" to describe the case as a "political provocation." He said he would arrange a meeting for the Ambassador with President Nazarbayev to discuss it. He recommended the Ambassador should admit to Nazarbayev that Sharp violated Kazakhstani law and explain that Sharp's action were "unthinking." This approach with the president should ensure a positive resolution of the case, Sarybay said. We believe the fall-out from the Sharp case represents a powerful battle at the top of Kazakhstan's leadership between progressive and regressive forces. Sarybay also asked about the prospects for a visit by Secretary Clinton to Kazakhstan, and floated the idea of proposed a meeting by a senior U.S. official with a senior Iranian official during the Eurasia Media Forum in Almaty in April, which we gently shot down. END SUMMARY.

"UNCONSTRUCTIVE" TO CALL CASE A "PROVOCATION"

[1](#)2. (S) Presidential Foreign Policy Adviser Kairat Sarybay called in the Ambassador on March 12 to discuss the criminal case against Peace Corps volunteer Anthony Sharp. Magzhen Iliyassov, the seemingly pro-Western director of the Presidential Administration's Foreign Policy Center and President Nazarbayev's personal interpreter, also attended the meeting but did not speak up. Sarybay told the Ambassador, "You asked for my advice, so I'll be very honest. We're dealing with a very specific issue with the Sharp case, but it's growing. My feeling is that any further allegations of a 'political provocation' would not be constructive." Sarybay said that both sides should put the matter behind them, and that the Ambassador should tell

President Nazarbayev he regrets that Sharp violated the law but that he did it unthinkingly. "This would create a good environment for us to move forward in accordance with your discussions with Foreign Minister Tazhin," he argued. (NOTE: "Your discussions with Foreign Minister Tazhin" means the understanding the Embassy has had since January that Sharp would go to trial, be convicted, have his sentence suspended, and be deported -- an agreement that broke down on February 26 when Sharp was convicted and sentenced to two years in prison. END NOTE.)

13. (S) The Ambassador explained our view of "provocation" had come from the clear and concrete facts of the case -- a bag containing explosives given to Sharp by someone else as he was about to exit the premises of the mine, guards waiting to arrest him when he departed the mine, and false witnesses at his trial. The point in using this term was not to criticize Kazakhstan, and certainly not to imply the President's complicity, but to make fully clear how the U.S. media, Congress, and some in the Administration would view the case if it became public. We have so far successfully persuaded Sharp and his family to keep the case out of the media and to refrain from contacting Members of Congress so that the Kazakhstani government can resolve this case in accordance with its commitments to us. Sarybay responded that the Kazakhstani side is also keeping it out of the press. (NOTE: In fact, this is true. The court case is widely known in Ridder, the site of the original incident, but, remarkably, nothing has appeared in any media outlet in Kazakhstan or in Russia. END NOTE.)

PROMISE TO ARRANGE MEETING WITH NAZARBAYEV

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14. (S) The Ambassador said that in a meeting with Nazarbayev to discuss the Sharp case, he would praise Foreign Minister Tazhin for his constructive efforts, explain that he insists all Americans in Kazakhstan must obey local law, admit that we have some differences about the facts of the case but acknowledge that Sharp unthinkingly did wrong in trespassing in a restricted area, and stress that we respect the Kazakhstani court system and wish to move forward with Kazakhstan in the new Obama administration. Sarybay responded, "This wording is good; these statements would not cause any difficulties for us. We'll arrange a meeting with my boss" -- meaning Nazarbayev -- "sooner is better than later." Sarybay said a meeting the following day (March 13) might even be possible. If that did not work, it would be after Nazarbayev's ten-day trip abroad which begins on March 14.

15. (S) Sarybay added, "(Kazakhstani Ambassador to the United States Yerlan) Idrissov, whom Nazarbayev respects, tells me we have great plans and opportunities in the bilateral relationship. President Nazarbayev's January meeting with CENTCOM Commander General Petraeus was a big success. Let's keep the Sharp case low-profile. Just say you regret that the incident occurred and are committed to moving forward with an enhanced bilateral relationship. You'll receive a good response from the boss. I'm sure this kind of conversation with the boss will resolve this matter." The Ambassador responded he would willingly follow through because he could do so with a clear conscience. Sarybay promised to inform FM Tazhin and Presidential Administration head Aslan Musin about his conversation with the Ambassador. He thanked the Ambassador for his understanding and flexibility. To rib Sarybay, the Ambassador responded, "See, I'm not such a bad guy." Sarybay responded, "No, not at all a bad guy, but you are very firm and strong."

PROSPECTS FOR A VISIT BY SECRETARY CLINTON

16. (S) During the less intense part of the meeting, Sarybay asked about the prospects for a visit by Secretary Clinton to Kazakhstan. The Ambassador explained that she had just

responded to Tazhin's invitation to attend the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council's Security Forum in Kazakhstan in June, promising that the United States would be represented there. He said it is too early to know about the Secretary's travel schedule in coming months, but believes she would welcome the opportunity to visit Kazakhstan.

"COULD WE PLAY A ROLE WITH IRAN?"

17. (S) Sarybay said that a journalist recently had suggested to him using the Eurasia Media Forum in Almaty in April to arrange a meeting between "a senior U.S. official, perhaps Special Representative Holbrooke, and a senior Iranian official. They could 'unexpectedly' meet in Almaty," Sarybay explained. The Ambassador replied that when Tazhin travels to Washington in May, he might want to raise Kazakhstan's willingness to be helpful with Iran. The Ambassador took pains to make clear that any early U.S. diplomacy with Iran, should it occur, would likely be in very quiet channels. While an "accidental meeting in Almaty at an international event" would not be very realistic, the Ambassador recalled that Henry Kissinger had sealed Nixon's opening to China at secret meetings in Tashkent.

18. (S) COMMENT: From the beginning, we have double-tracked the Sharp case with the Foreign Ministry and with several Presidential advisers, most importantly (and quietly back-channel) with State Secretary Kanat Saudabayev (former Ambassador to the United States and long-standing Nazarbayev confidante), through Saudabayev's Chief of Staff, Roman Vassilenko. We know that for the "agreement" -- Sharp's conviction, suspended sentence, and deportation -- Foreign Minister Tazhin has gone far, far out on a limb for us to do battle with the KNB, which he himself once briefly headed.

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However, the current KNB chief is President Nazarbayev's former personal bodyguard, whom he is said to trust implicitly. The current fire-storm over the word "provocation" started only after the Ambassador met with Presidential Chief of Staff Aslan Musin on March 3, at the Saudabayev camp's urging. To read him into the issue, and to ensure clarity, we provided him our two non-papers on the Sharp case that had had strictly limited circulation in the Foreign Ministry and at the Presidency. However, with Musin, this was probably the first time we had gotten directly to the President himself, whom, we speculate, probably went ballistic, with the KNB egging him on, over the word "provocation." But Nazarbayev is most certainly no dummy, and he probably keyed in immediately to the fact, which we clearly stated in the first non-paper, that we believe this case has the potential to derail an enhanced U.S.-Kazakhstan relationship in the early days of the Obama Administration. If this case concludes as we desire, and as we have fought for -- and we remain cautiously optimistic that it will -- then we have further evidence that President Nazarbayev himself is fully committed to an enhanced relationship with the United States. END COMMENT.

HOAGLAND